DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 044 724 CG 005 968

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TITLE	Drugs on Campus and in the Secondary Schools.
INSTITUTION	Brookline Public Schools, Mass.
PUB DATE	1 Oct 70
NOTE	12p.: Paper presented at the National Association of College Admissions Counselors Convention in Boston, Massachusetts, September 30 - October 3, 1970
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.70
DESCRIPTORS	Adolescents, *Alcoholism, *Drug Abuse, Drug Addiction, *Health Education, High School Students, School Responsibility, School Role, *Social Problems, *Teenagers

ABSTRACT

This paper presents observations on the current drug scene. (1) There is a growing reluctance of high school students to examine the drug scene. (2) Students are ignorant regarding many factors of drugs. (3) There is a danger involving the use and abuse of alcohol among teenagers. (4) Younger children are now being added to those sampling drugs. (5) Will new materials available to teach about drug abuse lull the schools into thinking that this avenue will solve the drug problem? (6) Time should be devoted to study factors associated with group status and prestige in order to understand the appeal of drugs to the young. (7) The treatment of any drug problem of a serious nature is beyond the capacity of the public schools. (8) Many teachers admit to the sampling of drugs. The main danger in drug education lies in exciting the curiosity of the young and naive instead of dissuading them from dangerous experimentation. Only a cooperative school community effort over a sustained period of time will make even a dent in drug prevention. (Author)

ED0 447724

"Drugs on Campus and in the Secondary Schools."

Paper Delivered at the Annual Conference
National Association of College Admissions Counselors

Boston, Massachusetts

October 1, 1970

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CG 005 968

DRUGS ON CAMPUS AND IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Introduction

Instead of presenting a formal talk, I would rather share with you today a few observations on the current drug scene among our young people. My remarks will primarily consider public school youngsters and my own feelings concerning where we are in efforts to help students using drugs or contemplating the use of drugs in the near future. These comments and observations are admittedly based on a small sample and chiefly include students, young people and addicts from the Greater Chicago and Boston areas. In speaking with these young people, their parents, teachers, counselors and physicians, I have noticed some communalities that might be of interest to counselor's and college admissions officials in their own work with these young people.

Observations on the Current Drug Scene

1. First, in recent months I have been aware time after time of the growing reluctance of high school students, especially juniors and seniors, to examine the drug scene. This reluctance I believe does not stem from defensiveness or hostility on the part of students. Two or three years ago this might have been true, but in recent times this reluctance seems to almost verge on boredom or indifference. In short, students have been so bombarded by parents, teachers, ministers, friends, T-V, and other channels of communication concerning drugs, that they simply do not wish to spend much time discussing this subject.

2. The second observation I have noticed is closely linked to this growing reluctance of students to discuss the drug scene. However, this second observation has not changed over the past five years. In fact, even though students feel increasingly sophisticated regarding drugs, they are still absymally ignorant regarding many factors involving the social, legal, and pharmacological aspects of drugs.

Therefore, although students profess a desire to discuss drugs less, these same young people have inherited or acquired the same ignorance as the young people preceeding them the past five years or more. For those of us working with adolescents and young adults this means the job of reaching these young people is even more difficult than a few years ago. At least at that time youngsters were curious and willing to talk about drugs. Today it is difficult to engage even high school freshmen in sustained discussions of the pros and cons of drugs.

3. The third observation I would share with you concerns the danger of drugs. I would hate to underestimate this danger for it is constantly present whenever youngsters recklessly "pop pills" or accept from "friends" anything promising a new thrill or excitement. At the same time I would add that an even greater danger lies in a related area.

This danger involves the use and abuse of alcohol among teen-agers and young adults and it far exceeds any threat drugs hold now or in the distant future. In fact, because of its accessibility and social acceptance, alcohol, singly or in combination with drugs, poses a very real danger in many areas. Consider for a moment the financial costs in accidents, insurance rates, work losses in business and industry, and so on. Add to this the number of divorces and separations caused by alcohol, and the untold number of children whose lives have been adversely effected by alcoholic parents, and you have but a small picture of the effect of alcohol on our present society.

The advent of a drug culture has in many ways simply opened new avenues for troubled, disturbed, bored and pleasure-seeking youths. Past generations often became "hooked" on booze during their high school or college days, much like some students today on drugs. The caution I would add applies to those concerned solely with drugs and relates to the very real and ubiquitous nature of alcohol abuse. This simply cannot be separated from the drug scene irrespective of social, legal, psychological or sociological considerations. It is a problem this country has never really dealt with "head on" and it must be faced if we expect to realistically deal with drugs.

4. Another observation that seems important relates to both the amount of drug usage among young people and the time of onset. Increasingly, we

in the public schools are aware of interest and actual experimentation among pupils at the junior high school and elementary school levels. This means children from eight to fourteen are now being added to the number of high school and college students sampling drugs. Obviously the handling of these students requires techniques, methods and school policies quite different from those with older adolescents.

If brothers and sisters, aunts' and uncles', and yes, mothers and fathers, are actively engaged in the sporadic or regular use of drugs, it is almost inevitable that younger and younger children will also partake of the drug scene. This implies that school efforts to educate and assist youngsters will go for naught unless we include this wider audience of adults in our programs. The difficulties in reaching this audience are too numerous to mention. However all educators should seriously question the effectiveness of current drug programs failing to provide for community involvement and participation.

5. We in the public schools have noticed a promising trend in the past year or two in dealing with drug abuse among students. This positive sign concerns the quantity and quality of instructional materials on drugs now available for classroom use. The increase in materials in this area during the past year and a half has reached such proportions that a single individual would lack the time for film previewing, the reading of books and articles, and keeping up with new programs and innovations. In fact, there are now journals and professional organizations devoted to just these purposes.

Although the increase in instructional aids has been welcomed by educators, these materials carry with them certain cautions. Probably the most

important question in this entire area is whether the use of these devices will lull the schools into thinking that this avenue alone can solve the drug problem? A corollary to this concern is whether these aids might have a reverse effect and evoke the premature curiosity of youngsters in drugs?

At present we lack research and experimentation on these questions. However we do have some means of avoiding pitfalls in the selection of materials and instructional aids. The most critical factor in this selection process concerns the development of the materials and their use on a trial basis prior to marketing. A simple rule of thumb of purchasing only items which have been thoroughly tested with some sample populations can solve this problem quite easily. On the other hand, this screening of materials fails to answer the question of whether we in the public schools are fanning flames or putting out fires when we present drug materials to students.

6. A sixth observation that warrants attention concerns what might be called the sociology of drugs. Some pioneer work in this area has been done by Dr. Daniel X. Freeman and his associates. However scant attention has been paid to the factors influencing the preference of a youngster for one kind of drug over another. We also lqck data about transitional factors determining changing drug preference by age groups, personality types, ethnic groups, socio-economic groups, and so on.

On this topic, consider for a moment the sudden increase in heroin use by suburban, middle-class youngsters. What is it that has attracted this group to this drug when it traditionally was found primarily in ghettos and in the inner-city? Consider too the increased use of psychedelics and hallucinogens in the past few months among high school and college populations.

Remember, only a short time ago some felt LSD and other hallucinogens were on the decrease among these groups. However, such drug experts as Dr. David Lewis now feel we are in for a period of greater experimentation and abuse with this category of drugs.

It would appear we should devote as much time to factors associated with group status and prestige, as we have traditionally spent on conditions associated with idiosyncratic patterns of growth, if we expect to understand the appeal of drugs to the young. Certainly we are all prone to speak of "group pressure" as one key determiner of the initial drug experience. However, few ask which sub-group exerts this pressure or why this particular sub-group has power over an individual's selection process? Until we begin to deal with these influences it is highly doubtful that we can really deter youngsters from adverse decisions regarding drugs.

7. The decision to sample and experiment with drugs often leads to serious consequences directly involving schools. Frequently it is this institution that either identifies or is sought by students when the drug experience goes "sour" or is beyond the control of the individual. Unfortunately most schools are quite unprepared to deal with young people when this eventuality occurs. This lack of responsiveness on the part of schools is probably most apparent when students and their families require referral sources and treatment facilities outside the school context.

To those of us working in the public schools, it has long been apparent that outside referral sources and treatment facilities are in short supply for any youngster with a serious emotional problem. This fact has been shared in recent years with an expanded audience of parents and concerned

adults because of the drug problem. Nonetheless, the shortage persists and the schools are now faced with the same dilemma with a larger and larger group of troubled youngsters.

I share with you my growing concern over the lack of outside referral agencies because I see mounting pressure by parents and community officials to use the school as "whipping boys" for the drug problem. This attachment of blame readily solves the question of responsibility for dealing with this concern, and in addition, often carries with it the unspoken accusation of how the problem got out of hand in the first place. A final factor in this scapegoating involves financial costs. It is obviously far easier to have schools already in existence take the responsibility for drug abuse than erect new facilities with additional personnel.

The treatment of any drug problem of a serious nature is beyond the capacity of the public schools. This fact must be acknowledged by educators and shared with the public if we expect the moral and financial backing required for assisting young people and their families. If we do not, and if we continue to apologize and do patch-up work on seriously disturbed youngsters, we will do these youngsters a grave injustice by impeding progress in establishing treatment facilities and rehabilitation centers.

By now, any community or suburb with a population of 50,000 or more should have its own residential treatment center for runaways, delinquents and drug dependent youngsters. This facility in most instances will require local funds and support because federal and state assistance for these projects is a distant dream. This myth of outside support must also be shared with the local community for too often it is assumed money is already available or forthcoming in these areas.

8. Another observation directly related to the disposition of youngsters dependent on drugs, has to do with school policies regarding students apprehended selling, using or possessing drugs. My experience indicates many schools still lack written policies when these occasions arise, leading them to "fly by the seat of their pants" with each new case. Tragically, many administrators feel this approach is more just and compassionate than fixed procedures for various contingencies. However, the net result of this approach is usually a hurried, unilateral, ill-considered, and arbitrary decision. As a consequence, crucial events in the life of a youngster are sometimes based on compassion but just as frequently they are dictated by expediency.

9. A final, and often unspoken observation, concerns the teacher of today's young people. We who have been in the field of education for a number of years would be naive to imagine that none of these teachers have themselves experimented with drugs during their college days. In fact, many new teachers will quite candidly admit to the sampling of drugs when this topic is discussed. Some will go so far as to "rap" with their students on this area, much to the chagrin and embarrassment of administrators and school boards.

Public school educators encounter many problems with the "new breed" of teacher emerging from Today's colleges and universities. For those of us responsible for drug prevention programs, one major hurdle lies in convincing idealistic and laissez-faire teachers that the drug decision by a fourteen-year old is quite different from that of an enlightened twenty-one year old.

In addition to this obstacle many of us involved with public school drug programs face the reluctant or indifferent teacher. This individual is

not necessarily a new or young teacher. In many cases, as you might imagine, these are the experienced and older teachers in the school system. For them, drugs are something outside the classroom setting and they wish no involvement in affairs beyond their subject or discipline.

At this juncture in our attempts to help children and adolescents facing the temptation of drugs, I am thoroughly convinced all educators, not just specialists and outside experts, must become involved in drug prevention efforts. This means the schools face a massive effort in training teachers, not simply about the legal and pharmacological aspects of drugs. This in itself will not help the majority of youngsters. Rather, teachers need training in dealing with group behavior, value-ladden issues and attitudinal postures of youngsters. It is only at this level educators can truly help the young person caught up in a drug culture reinforced by adult societies own reliance on chemical happiness.

Comments and Reflections on Drug Prevention Programs

I don't think schools can be smug or optimistic at this point regarding what has already transpired or might prevail in the future concerning the drug scene. Unfortunately, the problem of averting tragedies through drug abuse is a complex and confusing problem. This concern is further complicated by the lack of adequate knowledge about many drugs and effective programs directed at preventative measures. Sadly, the knowledge of drugs, in and of itself, does not reveal automatic programs for the careful and sensible use of drugs and medications. If anything, the danger in drug education lies in

exciting the curiosity of the young and naive, instead of dissuading them from dangerous experimentation.

However, adults involved with youngsters already abusing drugs have discovered some approaches and techniques that seem to offer hope in reaching those not yet using drugs. In practically every instance the crucial facts indicate that efforts to reach youngsters must begin early, must involve parents, must include law enforcement and community officials, and most important, must be well coordinated to insure continuity and comprehensiveness of efforts.

In most communities the major responsibility for drug prevention programs will invariable fall on the public schools. No other social institution has a captive audience of young people some six to eight hours a day supported by public funds. As a consequence, taxpayers will expect educators to produce programs and services for the millions yet untouched by drugs. The schools should resist these pressures from the community to assume responsibilities doomed to failure in advance, unless the total community agrees to share this burden. <u>In short, only a cooperative school-community effort over a sustained period of time will make even a dent in drug prevention</u>. The following components are suggested as minimal requirements for any effective school-community drug prevention endeavors.

<u>Key Elements in Effective School-Community Drug Prevention Programs</u>

A. Organization of joint school-community drug education committee with a wide representation of available talent and resources.

B. Written school policies concerning the disposition of youngsters apprehended selling, using or possessing drugs.

C. Training of school staff members in communication skills and attitudinal change.

D. Planning and implementation of curricular materials and programs, especially at the elementary and junior high school level.

E. Working arrangements with local law enforcement officials to protect youngsters and their families and to insure cooperation between schools and enforcement agencies.

F. Guidance, counseling and medical facilities in the schools for emergencies and agents of referral.

G. Referral sources and rehabilitation agencies in the immediate area of the community.

H. Education and involvement of parents and concerned adults in the greater community.

I. Research and evaluation of techniques, programs and facilities for assisting youngsters.

J. Continuity of all programs through committees and delegated responsibility.

These key elements in school-community drug prevention programs should be viewed as minimal components in combatting the problem of drugs. I offer them to you as essential considerations in gaining perspective concerning the magnitude of the problem before us. There are simply no quick and easy solutions for we as educators in assisting youngsters and their families in both preventative and rehabilitative efforts. Hopefully, we are ~~not~~ now at a point where the number of young people suffering from the legal, physiological and psychological afflictions of drugs, has aroused the public to such an extent that massive efforts will be mounted to alleviate these conditions. If this does not occur, we may be sure the situation will not disappear and will instead continue to disrupt and impede the development of thousands of our young people.